

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRUSSE 00903 161900Z
ACTION SIL-01

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 00903

USEEC

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB
SUBJ: ICFTU'S CONCERNS OVER UGTT'S FUTURE

1. MISSION HAS LEARNED THAT OTTO KERSTEN, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU), PLANS TO ARRIVE IN TUNIS JAN. 22 ON A THREE-DAY VISIT DESIGNED TO HELP HEAL THE BREACH EXISTING BETWEEN ITS TUNISIAN AFFILIATE, THE UGTT, AND TOP LEADERS OF THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT.
 2. THE PLANNED VISIT GROWS OUT OF DISCUSSIONS IN BRUSSELS JAN. 12 AND 13 BETWEEN KERSTEN AND UGTT GENERAL SECRETARY HABIB ACHOUR. AFL-CIO EUROPEAN REPRESENTATIVE IRVING BROWN PARTICIPATED IN AT LEAST ONE OF THOSE MEETINGS.
 3. BOTH THE ICFTU SECRETARIAT AND BROWN DESCRIBED TO MISSION OFFICER THE MEETINGS WITH ACHOUR AS PRODUCTIVE.
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THE FEAR AT THE ICFTU HEADQUARTERS HAS BEEN THAT ACHOUR WAS MORE AND MORE BEING DRAWN BY TUNISIAN OPPOSITION POLITICIANS INTO A NEGATIVE STANCE OF OPPOSING TUNISIAN PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA AND OF CRITICIZING EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT SADAT.

4. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE JAN. 13 AT THE ICFTU HEAD-

QUARTERS ACHOUR PUT HIMSELF ON RECORD THAT THE DEMANDS OF THE UGTT ARE "PURELY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IN CHARACTER," AND THAT THE TUNISIAN UNIONS ARE NOT TRYING TO SEIZE POLITICAL POWER. "EVERY SPECULATION OR TENDENTIOUS MANEUVER PORTRAYING UNION ACTIONS AS HAVING A POLITICAL ASPECT IS ABSOLUTELY WITHOUT BASIS IN FACT," ACHOUR SAID IN A PRESS STATEMENT RELEASED BY THE ICFTU.

5. AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE ACHOUR DISTRIBUTED AN 11-POINT DECLARATION APPROVED BY THE UGTT IN TUNIS JAN. 10. TWO POINTS PROCLAIMED THE UGTT'S "DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PRESENT SOCIAL AND UNION POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT" AND ITS "AGREEMENT WITH THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT" (TRANSLATION: SUPPORT OF THE GOT'S MODERATE MIDDLE EAST POLICY).

6. IN THE ICFTU PRESS STATEMENT KERSTEN SAID THAT CONTRARY TO THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN "CERTAIN GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED TUNISIAN NEWSPAPERS," DECISIONS TAKEN AT THE JAN. 8-10 UGTT EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING "ARE NOT IN OPPOSITION WITH THE PRINCIPLES AND POLICIES OF THE ICFTU."

7. COMMENT: ACHOUR, LONGTIME MEMBER OF THE ICFTU EXECUTIVE BOARD, IS THE LAST REMAINING TOP LABOR LEADER FROM AFRICA REMAINING IN THE ICFTU FAMILY. THE PRESS CONFERENCE HERE WAS A PROTECTIVE EMBRACE AGAINST

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HIS CRITICS AND A FRATERNAL WARNING FOR ACHOUR, LEST HE ALLOW HIMSELF TO BE TEMPTED BY THE TUNISIAN OPPOSITION LEADERS SO ARDENTLY WOOING HIM.
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